DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 149 356 CS 203 867

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TITLE Teaching Rhetoric: An Alternative to English Composition and Fundamentals of Speech.
PUB DATE 77
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (28th, Kansas City, Missouri, March 31-April 2, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Freshmen; *Composition (Literary); Composition Skills (Literary); *Cost Effectiveness; *Educational Needs; English Instruction; Higher Education; *Instructional Improvement; *Integrated Curriculum; *Speech Communication; Speech Skills

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses reasons for combining the composition and speech courses required of college freshmen. Observations about the traditional division of speech and composition instruction indicate that teachers with less experience are merely giving students "busy work" to exercise skills those students should have prior to college enrollment, thereby creating a confusing, frustrating, and fragmented educational environment for the students. If one assumes that speech and composition courses develop similar skills necessary for academic and professional achievement, then a course that uses tenured, experienced, and effective teachers to instruct students in both composition and speech communication will increase budgetary savings and the quality of education. (RL)

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Teaching Rhetoric: An Alternative to English Composition And Fundamentals of Speech

(A paper presented at the 1977 annual meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication)

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Teaching Rhetoric: An Alternative to English Composition
And Fundamentals of Speech

In consideration of moving toward a rhetoric, there have been various concerns voiced by faculty, students, and administrators about the feasibility of incorporating rhetoric into the required college curriculum. In the proposal outlined here, however, rhetoric will be viewed as an important aspect of the education and welfare of students, of the professional orientation of communications educators, and of a changing society.

The primary goal of higher education is to guide students toward progress in their chosen area of study. With this goal in mind, one of the major problems with respect to the development of effective communicative skills is the present system of requiring all students to enroll in a course in English composition and a course in speech. Perhaps it is time that the inherent weaknesses in this system are explored. It would appear that educators have made basic assumptions about the linguistic abilities and inadequacies of students that are in fact untrue and unadvantageous for the students.

Current Assumptions, Practices, and Rationale

By requiring students to take a composition class and a speech class, it appears that educators have ascertained that students do not have the language performance necessary for academic success; that they lack either verbal or written communicative skills. By requiring students to take mandatory courses in composition and speech, teachers are assuming

that they are providing the instruction necessary for students to be successful in a given academic program or that the requirement is basic to the educational process, and all students must enroll in and be successful if that process is to take place. This assumption does not validly concern itself with the students' language skill development. However, teachers of "English" and "speech" have assumed that they are going to "teach" their students to write or to talk, rather than provide the students with a process that will lead to more effective communication. It appears that teachers do not take into account or concern themselves with the previous sixteen years of writing and speaking experiences students have had. Assuming that students lack the ability to perform linguistically, surely teachers must wonder about how they completed the high school curriculum requirements (which generally includes not only eight semesters of formal language skills courses, but the use of language skills in all formal course work) and the rather complicated college admissions forms or the registration process. It is apparent that students' ability to function with linguistic adequacy in situations other than their immediate family/social/peer group environment is what is being questioned.

Every student enrolling in a college or university must, by necessity, have an adequate mastery of functional language abilities. The achievement levels and language skills mastery that a student must have reached prior to admission to the collegiate educational institution suggests that the acquisition and use of information at both the verbal and written levels destroys any assumption that would allow for questioning a particular student's or peer group's language abilities.

A look at the students who have entered their first year of study immediately following the high school experience reveals both passive and active communicative ability. Admissions applications of the majority of entering freshman students indicates that they have held jobs or organized, participated in, or held office in community or school organizations. Additionally, a survey conducted during the Fall term, 1975 by an academic service unit (Coalition for Use of Learning Skills) at The University of Michigan compiled data indicating a considerable consumer potential is being "tapped" through the advertising/marketing media. This information suggests that students are primarily concerned with classes of products (recordings and recording equipment, foods and cosmetic products, etc.) as against make of products (Pioneer vs. McIntosh, Nikkon vs. Kodak, Johnson Products vs. Johnson and Johnson, etc.). More importantly, this information suggests that students' discriminate consumer judgements are based on their desires being influenced by their concern with and ability to discern the effectiveness of communication that is concerned with consumer sales potential.

The assumption that students do not possess adequate language abilities, therefore, is misleading. The creation, dissemination, and utilization of pertinent information is essential to organizational productiveness and responsibility, consumerism, and maintaining employment. The more important discussion which more teachers should engage in, then would concern ending student frustration while ensuring their performance of language skill competency. It would indeed be refreshing for an instructor to ask his students to discuss what it is they would like to develop skill proficiency in and to explain proficiency in and to explain the reasons for offering the class,

instead of assuming that every student must "prove" that he is able to deal with the writing or verbal requirements placed on him. It would be wrong for teachers to teach without knowing why they are teaching, or what needs students have.

Another assumption higher education makes is that composition and speech must be taught in separate classes. This assumption has a valid point, if educators are thinking in terms of keeping graduate students employed or junior faculty members busy. However, this format becomes another student frustration and could be eliminated because of the similar nature of composition and speech. This format is frustrating because students cannot see the advantages of the courses, nor are they explained or made clear what the overall objectives are. (Additionally, like grades, students feel the format is instructor/department decided; that regurgitation of course material is expected; that competing with everyone of their classmates is not a necessary and healthy outcome of course enrollment; that academic advisement has the air of "tracking" or "programming," which leads nowhere; that higher education has become too impersonal, dealing with students, as it does, as if they were numbers instead of human beings.) Both abilities encompass skills which are similar: invention - developing the topic and idea; arrangement - organizing the ideas in a manner suitable to the material and the audience; style - framing the sentences and words to be effective; and delivery - presenting the finished product to the audience. Since these are basic elements common to both courses, then students, if teachers are concerned with reducing their frustration and heightening their skills, should not be required to take the courses as separate units. One course--rhetoric, the art and skill of effective communication -- would support the educational concern for the continued development of communicative skills.

Teachers of rhetoric would argue that composition and speech are in fact one course and not two.

It appears that by offering composition and speech as two separate courses, teachers have assumed that the student will be better able to function with a greater degree of academic success. It should be obvious that if a student is able to come up with topics and ideas, arrange his thoughts, develop a style that is effective, and deliver the produced material so that it is acceptable to his audience, then, the demand to do it twice -- once in composition and again in speech -- is surely an out-of-date, ineffective, and costly requirement.

Viewing the budget and its ineffective use, teachers and administrators should take into consideration a reordering of its priorities in order to bring the cost of teaching in line with the effectiveness that should result. Most colleges and universities currently teach more freshman English Composition classes than Freshman level speech classes, however, the number of composition and speech classes is far out of line with the cost involved to maintain the Freshman level courses. Most sincere scholars and teachers would agree with the premise that both composition and speech courses teach very similar communicative skills. If we too agree with this premise, then we can see that the duplication of efforts and manpower at the freshman level may equal a budget which is highly expensive and wasteful. While combining the two courses may not save the taxpayers from constantly increasing financial burden, it may save a great many students the agony of having to take both courses.

The rhetoric course, as a replacement for Freshman composition and speech courses, should be a one term requirement (the standard collegiate semester); should offer the student either five or six hours of credit, for

five or six class meetings per week; and should be a component of a system that provides for requiring each student to enroll in and successfully complete at least one additional, elective course in the communication area (Discussion, Training of the Speaking Voice, Phonetics, Linguistics, Grammar, Shakespeare, Basic Research Methods, Intermediate or Advanced Composition, Film Making, Journalism, and Radio and Television courses are but a few of the many options a student might have in completing this requirement) or a required course in communication in the students' major area (Communication for Political Science, Argumentative Writing for Philosophy, Writing and Communication in Education, and Communication in Sociology courses may also provide students with other options in completing the second course requirement). Borrowing an idea from Daniel Fader's Hooked on Books (1968), communication skills should be taught in every classroom, in all disciplines for the first year of a student's enrollment in an academic institution.

The savings from combining English Composition and speech courses into a rhetoric course will not be immediate in coming, since this is a long range plan. However, under a well-balanced, well-timed, and well-developed plan, the implementation of rhetoric courses should place some modest but invaluable funds at a department's disposal.

Consider this hypothetical case in support of my argument. College X currently has a Department of English and Speech with a faculty of thirty-three. Twenty-two are either Associate or Assistant Professors and are tenured. Eleven are not tenured and are instructors. Fifty percent of all classes taught in the department are English Composition, ten percent are Freshman level speech classes. This example actually states that sixty percent of all the courses taught in the Department are basic courses in communications.

The other forty percent are upper-divisional courses spread out over the myriad of course offerings possible in English Literature, Speech and Theatre. As in most colleges, College X separates the teaching of English Composition from the teaching of speech, and usually relegated the teaching of the basic courses to non-tenured and junior faculty members. As a result, a Freshman enrollment of two thousand would mean that each of the nineteen non-tenured and junior faculty members would have each term a four section enrollment of twenty-five students per section.

Since English Composition and Speech are required courses in actuality, sixteen teachers must service the two thousand students in English Composition. While only three and a half teachers will attempt to satisfy those students who are enrolled in speech. The departmental point of view is that written communication has priority over oral communication. In economic terms, since the department is budgeted for eight hundred thousand dollars per academic year (eight months), this means that four hundred eighty thousand dollars is being utilized for the teaching of basic courses in communications.

Should College X and the Department of English and Speech reorder its priorities to emcompass a Rhetoric course, it could eliminate six of the non-tenured positions leaving the remaining twenty-seven faculty to teach the Rhetoric courses. Thus saving the College and the Department nearly one hundred ten thousand dollars in salaries, and improving the delivery of effective communication skills to the student population. The result of this action would provide sixteen teachers to teach only six

sections of rhetoric for a total of ninety sections of required communication courses could be equally divided among the faculty, and the department would still be able to offer thirty-six sections of upper divisional English and speech courses during the academic year. It must be remembered that for the rhetoric requirement to be fully developed, as stated earlier in this section, a two course requirement is needed. Additionally, College X could increase its efficiency and effectiveness of course offerings by maximizing the enrollment so that each section of upper-divisional English classes would have twenty-two students, in contrast to its current practice of ninety-six upper divisional sections with an average enrollment of ten students per section.

Such a move by College X could not take place overnight. The faculty would have be be retrained and reoriented toward rhetoric. In-service training and formal academic seminars could be used to provide teachers with the background, philosophy, and techniques in merging English Composition and Speech.

College X would have to increase its budget by at least thirty thousand dollars for at least one academic year to accomplish either its in-service training or academic seminars. The funds would be used to retain consultants and lectures in the area of rhetoric, the administration of the program, and the acquisition of materials to be used. Such an increase is normal in economic terms because of the savings to be realized during the succeeding years. The in-service training or seminars would include study of language acquisition theories, strategies for teaching rhetoric, communication theory, media and its use in the class-

room, along with other pertinent issues that would expedite the implementation of rhetoric.

College X and the Department can expect to receive opposition to its plans from the tenured and non-tenured faculty. The tenured faculty will resist its implementation because of its misbelief that academic freedom implies the right to teach English or Speech uninfluenced and unquestioned by the administration of the College; and, that tenure implies that as long as classes are taught and grades are given, no one has the right to interfere with their particular choice of teaching strategies and the objectives of a given course. These are but two reasons why the tenured faculty may be expected to resist the implementation of rhetoric.

Non-tenured faculty will oppose the move largely due to the elimination of positions and loss of tenure tracking. However, a majority of non-tenured faculty may be expected to become active proponents of the merger because it may be viewed as means of obtaining security and possibly tenure at the College. Whatever means College X has at its disposal, be it the Board of Governors, Administration or Faculty, should be used to convince or persuade the Departmental members that implementation of rhetoric is to the best interest of the College, the students, and society. The ramifications of a move toward rhetoric are numerous and beneficial as this and other sections have attempted to point-out.

In summary, regardless of the opposition to be expected from the faculty, the plan has as its intended purposes cost

efficiency and effectiveness, reordering of departmental priorities, training and education of faculty for better service, and most importantly, teaching effective communication to the student population.

The cost involved in teaching the current composition and speech courses could, as it has been stated, be reduced, thereby saving the college needed funds to be used in other areas. While it is not the usual stand of educators to engage in cost effectiveness, currently it is top priority. Colleges and departments would do well to re-evaluate the current spending pattern for composition and speech classes. In combining the two courses, educators will establish that their profession is one that concerns itself with teaching effectiveness and cost efficiency, which can only enhance their accountability in this society. In the long run, it would be best for those educators who have a genuine concern for teaching effective communications to students to act in the best interest of that concern. There are times when teachers feel removed from the masses, working and living in their own little world, providing instruction that is inadequate and out-of-date, and teaching courses that keep them employed. It is time educators took a clear look at what is being taught, the effectiveness of the instruction, and the cost involved if they intend to maintain some degree of control over the educational process. A rhetoric course may be instrumemtal in achieving that end.

The basic rationale for this proposal is that composition and speech are related in that the same skills must be developed in each course. The discussion on the next section is concerned with, therefore, exploring the issue of the duplicity of composition and speech skills.

Consequences of Composition and Speech Duplicity

Reteaching the rhetorical skills from two different points of view tends to confuse students and lessen their communicative effectiveness, which thereby increases their overall frustration. Students of today, not unlike today's teachers, have enough problems in the academic environment without the compounding necessity of having to take two theoretically identical courses. It is possible through teaching a rhetoric course to develop the communicative skills necessary for academic and professional survival. Not only is it possible to create an unfrustrating academic environment for students, it is also possible to utilize what meager funds the college has in a more effective manner.

Several assumptions have been made about the teaching of written and oral communication that are based on the previous educational and professional experiences this writer has had in both areas. The following observations are drawn from those teaching and research experiences.

1. Students do not learn to "write" in the classroom. Writing is a skill that was developed years before they came to college. What happens in the college classroom is that teachers

engage in a task filled program that lends itself to "busy work." In many cases students write about topics that teachers choose and rarely develop their own inventive skill of creating topics and arguments that are based on their experiences, whether real or imaginary.

2. Students do not learn to "speak" in the classroom, for this is a skill that was also developed long before coming to college. Similar to the composition course, teachers engage in busy work that entails numerous projects and assignments which are, again, rarely student developed or student created. The inventive aspect of the communicative process is underplayed or forgotten about all together. When I was an undergraduate student my teachers of English Composition and fundamental courses in Speech engaged in "teacher" oriented materials and subjects. The work assigned was not conducive to communicative skill development. My classmates and I were forced to complete such time consuming projects as finding all the periods in a given chapter or making lists of one hundred intransitive verbs. Neither of these assignments implied a functional educational goal. As a teacher who has listened to the comments made by my colleagues, I have come to believe that the work required of students in composition and speech courses is, for the most part, intended to keep students busy completing assignments that do not aid them in the development of language skills. Students in those courses rarely develop the topics for their speeches, discussions, or papers.

3. While both written and oral communication entail some form of organization of material, teachers tend to stress "English"

or "speech" organization, rather than organization which is effective for any class or course. Teachers seem to teach organization as if every student who takes their classes is preparing to become either an English major or a speech major. To that end, teachers do the student a disservice.

4. Teachers have assumed, but unfortunately have not effectively operationalized this assumption, that written and oral communication are a service provided to the student to better enable him to survive within the entire college, not just to pass the course. Students should be able to prepare both written and verbal communication that is effective on a college-wide basis. If a student is a science major he should be able to produce science oriented communication as well as non-science communication. In order for him to be able to do this, the focus of the required communications course must be extended to cover the wide range of possibilities a student has in college. To be as restrictive as teachers currently are, teaching composition for composition's sake and speech for speech's sake, limits the student in what and how he performs.

5. On another note, teachers have assumed that the teaching of communicative skills should be the duty of the junior faculty or graduate students, while the senior faculty are allowed to engage in "more meaningful study": Poe, Shakespeare, Aristotle, Corax, ad infinitum. It may be to our advantage to utilize those individuals who have a genuine concern for skill development

in the required courses. What is needed are teachers who care about students, not insensitive bodies who pick-up a pay check at the end of every month or who are so locked into their "special author" that they lose all sight of the needs of their students.

Assumptions about how students learn how to speak or write, the ability of English and Speech teachers to provide adequate communicational skill development that aids the students, and the assignment of junior faculty and teaching assistants to Freshman courses all have lead me to be concerned about the overall effectiveness of the communicative skills learning process. I have observed and made note of the assumptions discussed above in my teaching experiences in four college and university settings which differed in respect to size, location, student body composition, type and availability of funding, and educational philosophy.

The previously mentioned assumptions are vital concerns. Because they are, teachers must resolve those assumptions in a manner that is indicative of that concern. If it is the teacher's intention to engage in a rhetoric as a means of ending student frustration, saving cost, and serving society, then the course should and must be mandatory on a college wide basis. Every student who enrolls at the college should be required to take the proposed rhetoric course. Obviously, this step will not initially receive the full support of the student population, but, considering for the skills to be developed in them, it will naturally pay off in the future. If teachers expect students to be able and willing to communicate in an effective manner, then

students must learn by experience. The development of effective communication skills will come only in the actual practice of the art.

Teachers know that only after they have read Aristotle do they understand him. Teachers know that only after they have been guided by "a teacher" are they able to develop topics and areas of study that is based on his philosophy, his deeds, and his life and time. Teachers know this because they have had meaningful experiences, both happy and painful, intermingled with hard, cold instruction. I am not advocating that teachers unnecessarily be cold and hard. However, all teachers would like to provide meaningful, effective instruction that aids in the skill development necessary for making effective communicators out of their students.

It should not be left to chance that a student will acquire the communicative skills necessary to be effective. Teachers should not leave it to chance that each and every student will be able to be successful in his higher attainments at the college. It should not be left to chance that teachers are out of step with the needs of our technical, flexible and ever changing society. As teachers meet the mission and goals of the educational profession, let them do it with their minds on the best interests and needs of today's students, the leaders who must meet the challenge of the twenty-first century.

It appears that by offering composition and speech as two separate courses, teachers have assumed that the student will

be better able to function with a greater degree of academic success. It should be obvious that if a student is able to come up with topics and ideas, arrange his thoughts, develop a style that is effective, and deliver the produced material so that it is acceptable to his audience, then, the demand to do it twice -- once in composition and again in speech -- is surely an out-of-date, ineffective, and costly requirement.

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